DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 395 615 JC 960 366

AUTHOR Silver, Alan
TITLE The RMIT Wuhan Project.
PUB DATE Feb 96
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Community Colleges for International Development (19th, Phoenix, AZ, February 3-6, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Education; Foreign Countries; *International Cooperation; International Educational Exchange; International Programs; *International Trade; *Partnerships in Education; Postsecondary Education; *Student Characteristics; Study Abroad; *Trade and Industrial Education
IDENTIFIERS *Royal Melbourne Inst of Techn (Australia); Wuhan Yejin Univ of Science and Techn (China)

ABSTRACT

In March 1995, Australia's Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology began offering Australian and Chinese students an Associate Diploma of Business in International Trade at the Wuhan Yejin University of Science and Technology, in China. The course is offered at the University's China Iron and Steel Industry Training Centre, a joint project between the Australian and Chinese governments, and offers students the following benefits: (1) an international trade focus; (2) a short, 1-year course of study and a focus on practical skill-building; (3) an international setting for Australian students; (4) readily accessible foreign qualification for Chinese students; and (5) privileged entry into other courses in Australia. The program is presented entirely in English, except for some special tutorials in which the Chinese students may ask questions in Chinese, but Australian students are required to study Mandarin. In its first year, the program attracted students who had a strong desire to work in the field of international trade and a majority already had definite links with international organizations. While the ages of these students ranged from 18 to 50 years old, it was determined that students who were 25 years and older, with significant employment and life experience, tended to adjust better to the new environment and were better able to apply themselves to their studies. (TGI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 395 615

The RMIT Wuhan Project

By
Alan Silver
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
Melbourne, Australia

Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Community Colleges for International Development (19th, Phoenix, AZ, February 3-6, 1996)

JC 960 366

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A. Silver

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

THE RMIT WUHAN PROJECT

Presented by Alan Silver
Head Department of Marketing and International Trade
Project Director
RMIT - WYUST Project

In March 1995, ten Australian and twenty seven Chinese students began full-time studies on campus in Central China.

The course, an Associate Diploma of Business in International Trade, is presented in English at the Wuhan Yejin University of Science and Technology (WYUST) by staff from the RMIT Faculty of Business.

Background

This program is the first of a range of activities expected to develop from an agreement signed by the two universities last March. They agreed, among other things, to deliver RMIT award programs and the Centre's industrial training courses from the China Iron and Steel Industry Training Centre (CAISITC) located on the WYUST campus.

The Centre was a joint government project funded by Australian Aid Funding and China's Ministry of Metallurgical Industry (MMI) from 1990 to the end of 1994 when it was handed over with all its facilities to the Chinese side. RMIT has been involved in the CAISITC project from its inception and stepped in at the end of the official term to maintain the Australian presence there and its attendant advantages. The project was a success for both sides, training over 4500 managers and technicians from the iron and steel industry, many of them senior executives. The Chinese and Australian sides worked closely together over the years, developing strong personal and professional relationships.

As the prime educational providor, RMIT was always a respected part of the project and several of its staff employed at the Wuhan site through 1990-94 formed close relations with WYUST staff and leaders. The RMIT-WYUST Project thus began on an uncommonly firm social and professional base, solidly supported by government, industry and the university community. This is evidenced by the relative ease and speed with which it was implemented.

The first ideas on the base and character of RMIT-WYUST cooperation surfaced in October 1994. The project was defined, assessed and discussed on both sides in the two months to 2 December 1994 when a MOU was signed in Wuhan. In the next three months, all necessary approvals were secured, the RMIT-WYUST agreement drafted and negotiated, accommodation and teaching facilities prepared, the curriculum planned and all other key implementation tasks completed, including bringing the first RMIT staff and Australian students to Wuhan.

Project Development

The present aim is to establish the International Trade program solidly then, on the basis of that experience, introduce other RMIT programs consistent with China's training needs and the aims of the two universities. This line of development appears to have great promise but if it is to advance, the facilities now available in Wuhan will have to be much expanded.

The CAISITC Centre was designed to handle trainee groups of 50-60 at a time plus an expatriate team of up to 20 people. It was not planned to cope with the numbers of foreign and domestic students which, it would appear, can be drawn to Australian award programs in China. It seems that many more than the targeted students could be attracted to the opening program in 1996 and numbers could continue to grow in that program for some years. The initial enrolments came from China and Australia but students from North and Southeast Asia, Europe and North America could perhaps also be interested in such a course in China. Enrolments would tend to grow too with expansion of the range of courses offered at WYUST. So the universities may have to outlay substantial funds in the next few years on extending facilities if the project is to develop as it promises.

The International Trade program's first year has passed without major problems; all involved and associated seem pleased with its development. In early January of this year RMIT held what we believe was the first university conferring ceremony in China, with graduates being awarded their RMIT Associate Diplomas. It would be fair to say that both universities are delighted with the first year of the project, and it now enjoys the support of all relevant government authorities in both China and Australia. Though other types of joint activities may develop as time passes, the project is essentially about award programs and short training courses, and delivery of the International Trade course will probably remain the major joint activity for the next year or so.

Program Appeal

The program's appeal to Australian and overseas markets is already demonstrated by the rapid growth of the Melbourne-based course and the response to its introduction in Wuhan. It seems to offer students significant benefits:

- the international trade focus is topical and relevant to a developing global job market;
- its relatively short duration and focus on practical skill-building make it particularly attractive to graduates and mature-age applicants seeking retraining;
- it gains appeal from its offer in Wuhan: Australian applicants evidently accept the value of undertaking the program in an international setting with others actually and potentially operating in the international trade arena;
- Chinese applicants are responding to, among other things, the fact that it is a readily accessable foreign qualification and to,

- the opportunity it provides for privileged entry into other courses in Australia;

- its appeal is heightened by its shorter duration in Wuhan where the normally two-year course has been condensed into one intensive year.

Approaches are being made to industry and government, to secure supplementary benefits for students enrolled in the Wuhan program. Firms now trading in China are being asked to support promising students, provide work placement for current enrolees and employment opportunities for graduates of the program.

The inclusive fee for Australian students is reasonable for the program and associated services (accommodation, air fares, transfers, etc) but it is a substantial sum which, in itself, can deter many well-qualified people who might otherwise seek places in the course. Sponsorships and scholarships of various kinds are being sought from private and public sources to help make the program more accessible for them. Enquiries are proceeding through Australian Government bodies to identify schemes offering these types of benefits.

Considerable effort is going into making the students feel as comfortable and secure as possible in Wuhan. The accommodation facilities inherited from the government project are of extremely high quality by Chinese standards and the Australian students have found them quite satisfactory, but they are by no means luxurious and require constant work to keep in good order, including a number of repair and maintenance services not easily found in Wuhan. The same holds for teaching facilities and the upkeep of project equipment.

Wuhan is a large industrial city of almost seven million people with little notable charm. It lies roughly halfway between Hong Kong and Beijing on the main north-south railway line. The university is located close to the Yangtze River in Qingshan District which, though containing some moderately attractive areas, is also home to one of China's largest steel plants and that leaves its mark on the atmosphere and surrounding countryside. The traffic is heavy, the weather extreme: too hot in summer, too cold in winter; but the people are friendly, outgoing and hospitable, and the streets are safe to walk at any time day or night. It is more conservative than the great cities of the Eastern seaboard, Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, and compared to them, rather drab, with a more restricted range of entertainment, goods and services.

Added to this, students in provincial Chinese universities, are not accorded the status and degrees of freedom taken for granted in Australia. Particular difficulties arise too for foreigners because university leaders see themselves very much in *loco parentis* with a heavy responsibility for the moral wellbeing of their charges, whatever their ages. A few special concessions had to be negotiated for the Australian group to make campus life more bearable. After lengthy discussion, it was decided they could watch videos in their apartments, *if a member of the Australian teaching staff were present to ensure the material did not pose any moral threat.* It was finally agreed too that Australian male and female students could share the one two-storey residential unit - but not the same room or floor.

In general, it is not an easy environment for Australians and it takes a constant outlay of resources to help them settle in and remain contented there. Yet its very lack of similarity with the places most have come from gives it a peculiar appeal, especially when they are committed to studying it and learning how to cope well with it.

The Chinese students generally do not find this environment at all daunting. Like the Australians, they live on campus but in crowded dormitories with few of the comforts enjoyed by their foreign classmates. Yet the privileged position granted the Australian students clearly does not breed envy or ill-feeling. The two groups mix exceptionally well and spend a great deal of time together outside class hours. The Chinese students took it on themselves to look after their Australian guests and make them as happy as possible. The social dimension is perhaps the most satisfying feature of the whole project and goes a long way to countering the more negative aspects of expatriate existence in Wuhan.

Mode of Delivery

Clearly, whatever its external appeal and supplementary benefits, the project has little chance of success if it runs badly and acquires a poor reputation. Accordingly, a special effort was made to assure its quality, in areas of program delivery, in teaching methods, curriculum development, assessment procedures, course materials and so on. While student evaluations have been by no means uncritical, the program seems generally to have met their expectations.

Particular care is taken to respond quickly to student criticisms. It is not always practicable to comply with individual suggestions, but each is treated seriously, with respect, and where it is not possible to satisfy the particular requirement an appropriate explanation is offered. The Chinese students find this approach and the more open Western teaching style especially appealing. In Central China, the customary approach is still based very much on the notion that students should be seen and not heard - except when they are directly questioned by their instructors which, in fact, does not happen very often.

The program is presented entirely in English, except for some special tutorials in which Chinese students may ask questions and be answered in Chinese. All lectures and formal class sessions are in English. Nine Chinese academics from the CAISIT Centre are involved in delivering the program. All are proficient in English, all worked with the Australian team on the earlier project for several years, and three have graduate degrees from Australia.

An RMIT Academic Director and Administrative Officer are stationed full time in Wuhan. RMIT teaching staff are flown in from Australia for short visits according to the requirements of the timetable. With the exception of the language units, the subjects are taught in sequential blocks; one subject after another for one-two weeks each. The individual RMIT lecturers can spend one to three weeks in Wuhan at a time. The Academic Director covers two subject areas and the Project Administrative Officer teaches English language.

Mandarin is a compulsory subject for Australian students, English for Chinese students, even though the Chinese students had to have high English proficiency to enter the course in the first place. In their English studies, lessons are structured very much around the special terminologies of the other subject tackled in the course and address problems of business presentations, effective report writing and the like. Both language units entail eight hours class contact per week for the duration of the course. Due to the peculiar situation in which they are working, mixing daily with Chinese in a Chinese environment, with hours of unavoidable language practice, most of the Australians become fluent and proficient.

The present arrangement is for the visiting RMIT staff to deliver most of the lead lecturers and the WYUST people work mainly in tutorials. This is not a reflection on the competence of the Chinese side. The fact is, the International Trade curriculum and many of its units are new to them and there was little time prior to the course starting for them to familiarise themselves with the various subject areas as they must be delivered within the RMIT Diploma program.

Who Enrols?

Everyone who enrolled in the program expressed a strong desire to work in the field of international trade and a majority already had definite links with organisations operating in that field.

Ages range across the total group from 18-50, with the average somewhere in the mid-twenties. Roughly half the Chinese group are currently employed or have resigned positions to study in the Centre. Seven of the ten Australians are in the same situation. Several people on both sides have considerable work experience and now hold or have held responsible executive positions. Both groups contain individuals already possessing graduate qualifications.

A few students on the Chinese side were sponsored by firms within the iron and steel industry; the majority funded their own studies out of savings or were supported by their families. One of the Australian students was funded by an employer, another identified the expenditure connected with studying in Wuhan as a cost of his own fairly substantial import-export business. Three others, funded by their families, represent the family firms in China and see their work there as leading towards business opportunities. Four of the remaining five found their own way by means of loans and/or savings. At least one of the Australians with previous employment experience is deliberately retraining and views the course as the gateway to a new career.

The program will continue to be publicised to school leavers, but certain early impressions of the first intake suggest a more mature grouping may be marginally better equipped to meet its demands.

Given the benefits to the Australian community of drawing young people into international trade careers and training them in an Asian setting, it is important to draw school leavers into the Wuhan program. The youngest members of the group did function well both inside and outside the classroom. It does seem, however, that those just out of school do find it somewhat more difficult to operate effectively in the

conditions prevailing in Central China and, generally speaking, have a higher risk of not completing the program.

People 25-years and older, with significant employment and life experience, can find it less taxing, settling into the rather strange environment: for this and related reasons they should be better able to apply themselves to their studies for the duration of the program. In general, choice of training options within the grouping might be expected to be better-informed and more decisively career-oriented, implying higher levels of motivation. It is assumed also that mature applicants have more options than school-leavers for underwriting the costs of their in-China programs.

Conclusion

In its Wuhan role, RMIT has a privileged position within China. It enjoys the firm support and immediate incountry advice of the host university and can rely on ready assistance from important sections of industry, government and the academic community. Its base in Wuhan seems well-secured and its operations there promise to be successful.

Even if the present facilities are not extended for some time, it seems RMIT can count on a long period of development for the project. The Australian market for offshore courses of the Wuhan type is still largely untested and untapped and, though perhaps comparatively small, needs to be cultivated as a key element in the internationalisation of Australian education in general and RMIT curricula in particular. The domestic market for in-China RMIT programs seems virtually limitless and there are prospects of enrolments from countries other than China and Australia.